



BOARD WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

BOARD OF WRIGHT COUNTY

December 10, 2024

Tina Diedrick	District 1
Darek Vetsch	District 2
Jeanne Holland	District 3
Nadine Schoen	District 4
Michael Kaczmarek	District 5

DATE APPROVED: DECEMBER 17, 2024

Members Present: Jeanne Holland, Mike Kaczmarek, Nadine Schoen, Darek Vetsch

Members Absent: Tina Diedrick

Others Present: Matt Detjen, Elizabeth Karels, Schawn Johnson, Greg Kryzer, Lindsey Meyer, Marc Mattice, Kirby Moynagh, Lori Pawelk, Clay Wilfahrt, Shane Zahrt

Prior to the start of the meeting, Interim County Administrator Greg Kryzer distributed a handout with comments from Commissioner Tina Diedrick, who could not attend the workshop because she was attending the Association of Minnesota Counties Annual Conference.

County Board Chair Darek Vetsch opened the meeting at 9 a.m.

I. Review Planning & Zoning Procedures for Recording and Findings

Commissioner Jeanne Holland said that she was against changing the Planning Commission policy of not video recording commission meetings to have on YouTube like county board meetings, citing that some of the discussions are matters concerning a single landowner and it would be an invasion of privacy that doesn't need to be broadcast on the internet. Planning & Zoning Administrator Barry Rhineberger said his interpretation of the request being discussed wasn't to broadcast the Planning Commission meetings, but to memorialize audio recordings from the meetings. Holland added that Planning Commission meetings are held at night and would require county staff to be available to record video of the meetings. Vetsch asked how many requests Rhineberger has received over the last year for video. Rhineberger responded two requests were made.

Commissioner Mike Kaczmarek said there is no expectation of privacy at a public meeting. He added that he has received inquiries about why the meetings aren't recorded. He said a stationary camera in a corner would only require someone to hit "start" and "stop" and would require minimal staff effort. Vetsch said he has never received an inquiry seeking Planning Commission video. Commissioner Nadine Schoen said she would like to keep the current policy. Rhineberger said he was also asked about the findings that lead to Planning Commission decisions. He said findings are considered working documents up until the point an issue is voted on and not part of the public record in advance of adoption by the county board. Kryzer said that findings are given to those who had zoning requests denied. In the event of a contentious approval, notice is sent to all on the mailing list for that item.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to retain the current policy of not video recording Planning Commission meetings.

II. Schedule a Public Hearing on the Re-establishment of Records for County Ditch 19

Agriculture & Drainage Coordinator Matt Detjen said there has been a push from residents along County Ditch 19 to get the project moving forward. Detjen reminded the board that for public hearings, notice of the hearing needs to be published three consecutive weeks in the official county newspaper. He proposed Jan. 13 or Jan. 17 as the dates that would be best to conduct the public hearing. Kaczmarek said he expects this to be a contentious meeting because there has been friction in the past during meetings dealing with this matter and said he preferred an evening meeting. Holland said she prefers a 1 p.m. meeting time because it might be contentious and there would be more people

around at that time, adding that most of those who would attend the meeting are farmers and aren't in their fields so an afternoon meeting should not be an issue. Detjen added that bids came in under the staff estimate for tree removal along the ditch with a low bid of \$7,900 – more than half the price of the next-lowest bid.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to schedule a public hearing dealing with the re-establishment of records for County Ditch 19 at 1 p.m. Monday, January 13, 2025.

III. Review Project and Recommend Allocations for the American Rescue Plan (ARP) General Fund Account

Vetsch asked that this item be moved up on the agenda due to the number of staff attending that were only at the workshop for the ARP general fund agenda item. He said that it wouldn't be fiscally responsible to approve all the projects requested because it far exceeds the \$1,321,542 available for allocation. Vetsch said he would like to see requests for funding for ditch repairs to be prioritized because there has been neglect of the ditch system for decades. Kaczmarek said using the funds for ditch projects makes sense, especially for projects that are well into the process of completion, where there is a good idea of the hard costs and there aren't hidden costs that may occur on projects just getting started. Schoen said she would support funding ditches because it is a county problem that was created due to decades of ignoring the issue as the ditch system deteriorated.

Schoen asked about some of the specific requests. One was a request for \$1 million to hold for the future construction of a Household Hazardous Waste facility, which is expected to go out for bids in the first quarter of 2025. Assistant County Administrator Marc Mattice said the project is in the final design phase and has a \$4.5 million budget, but the construction manager estimated that the project could go approximately \$900,000 over budget as currently designed. Mattice has worked with Facilities Director Alan Wilczek to explore alternate bid options to keep the project within budget. The funding request was to set aside money in the event costs exceed the budget. Mattice stated that it will be a no-frills, bare-bones facility. He added that if the money wasn't needed, it could be allocated to other projects in the future. Holland said the current bidding climate is good and felt the project should come in under budget, especially if alternates are in place to reduce costs.

Schoen also asked about a \$200,000 funding request for a Grant Assistance Fund (GAF), which would be used as a local match for grants or to fund professional services needed to apply for grants for ditch repair projects. Detjen said the GAF is important because the fund could be utilized to bring in more grants and make Wright County more competitive with metro counties that have staff dedicated to exclusively writing grants. The \$200,000 requested could bring in more than \$1 million in grant money that might not be available without the commitment of a local match. Detjen added that this fund wouldn't necessarily have to be dedicated solely to Ag & Drainage.

The county board identified four ditches that are in the process of repairs or engineering work – Ditch 10, Ditch 20, Ditch 31 and Ditch 35 – with funding requests totaling \$330,000. Vetsch asked that a \$40,000 request for Ditch 10 near Grass Lake be moved into the GAF, bringing that total to \$240,000, with hopes of getting grant funding to reduce the cost on that project. Kaczmarek said there are 10 county ditches that currently have work in progress at varying stages and they should be prioritized for relief to landowners along those ditches. Mattice asked the board if the \$240,000 in GAF be opened to all county departments or restricted to ditches. The consensus of the board was to keep the money to fund ditch-related projects only.

Vetsch said that the Oracle ERP request is needed. Finance Director Lindsey Meyer said the county had to reconfigure the Oracle system when a change in healthcare providers was made. That change alone cost \$20,000. She added that future integrations can be done that would ease the flow of information and reduce the amount of manually inputted data that staff currently does. Kryzer said manually inputting data to spreadsheets inherently results in mistakes, so funding this request would be an improvement to system and would offset current costs. Meyer said that in the last six months, changes to the ERP system have come at a cost of \$100,000 and there could be another \$400,000 to \$500,000 in change costs over the next five years. Holland said she sees the benefit of having funds available to enhance the Oracle ERP system. Kaczmarek said he won't support the funding request for this

item. Vetsch said he was surprised to see requests coming in from agencies outside the county and felt bad that communication wasn't better articulated as to what types of projects would be prioritized.

RECOMMENDATION: It was the consensus of the board to recommend \$1.1 million in project funding through the American Rescue Plan General Fund, including \$500,000 for the Oracle ERP Enhancement Fund (and authorize signatures on a contract with eCapital Advisors to implement modules), \$240,000 to the Ag & Drainage Grant Assistance Fund, \$175,000 to repair tiles on County Ditch 20, \$100,000 to repair tiles on County Ditch 35, \$70,000 for a General Ditch Planning Fund that will help pay for engineering, redetermination of benefits and redetermination of records costs and \$15,000 for the installation of a water control structure on County Ditch 31.

IV. Review Legislative Priorities and Grant Opportunities for 2025

Kryzer presented the board with a list of 26 topics that the county wants to articulate with its legislative delegation, adding that he ran the list by in a meeting with Sen. Eric Lucero and Rep. Walter Hudson. Kryzer said many of the priorities deal with wetland issues and Department of Revenue issues. Another priority for the county is legislation to address backyard chickens. The ambiguity in the difference between a feedlot and a registered feedlot has caused confusion at the state level regarding backyard chickens and whether they're regulated under feedlot rules. Kryzer said the intention is to have a draft bill ready to be brought to the Legislature and, once the bill drops, action will likely happen quickly. Shane Zahrt, a lobbyist for Flaherty & Hood – a firm that contracts with Wright County to represent the county's interests and objectives at the State Legislature – said the League of Minnesota Cities is behind the proposed legislation.

Other priority items discussed included attempting to get a driver road testing station at the Government Center and the elimination of the requirement of an official county newspaper. Kryzer said the bid for the official county newspaper goes to the lowest bidder, not the paper with highest circulation. He said an online site – whether on the county website or a statewide website – could be created that lists all notices and announcements that are currently required to go through a print version of an official county newspaper. Costs for this service are skyrocketing, which Holland believes could get support from school districts and League of Minnesota Cities. Kryzer said the current law has been on the books for 100 years when newspapers were the primary source of getting news and, as it reads, the current law is essentially subsidizing one private business in each county.

Zahrt said the state's budget forecast isn't positive, which could result in some existing programs being eliminated as a way of preparing for a potential budget shortfall in 2027-28. Holland asked about the status of a bonding request for the Wright Technical Center in Buffalo – the last tech school for high school students in the state. Zahrt said the request was gaining momentum, but the 2024 legislative session was frustrating because the bonding bill didn't make it to the House floor before the session ended. Zahrt said the Wright Tech Center bill made headway in both the House and Senate and additional information was being requested in the final days of the session. Zahrt said he's hopeful the bill will get passed in the 2025 session, which begins Jan. 25.

Vetsch said another meeting is necessary to determine which county priorities get the biggest push. Zahrt said at the start of the session, Flaherty & Hood can push forward the bills that already have the language of the bill completed. He said he could come back for a meeting in January to fine tune other issues as bill language gets drafted. Kryzer said a Committee of the Whole should be convened in early January.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to set a Committee of the Whole meeting for 9 a.m. Monday, Jan. 6, 2025 to further discuss legislative priorities.

V. Review Retainer Agreement with Flaherty & Hood and Primacy Strategy Group

Vetsch said that Flaherty & Hood's lobbying efforts have been of benefit to the county. Kryzer said that the contract with Primacy Strategy Group, which would lobby on Wright County's behalf in Washington D.C., is still in the process of being finalized and will be brought forward to the county board when the contract arrive.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to authorize signatures on a contract with Flaherty & Hood to provide lobbying services for the 2025 Minnesota State Legislature session with a not-to-exceed figure of \$55,000. No action will be taken on the Primacy Strategy Group proposal until finalized contracts are received.

VI. Review 2025 County Board and Committee and Advisory Board Appointments

Mattice went through the list of committees and advisory boards that commissioners are members of. Kirby Moynagh, who won election from District 5 to become the district's commissioner in January, said he could simplify the process by taking over the committee assignments currently held by Kaczmarek.

The board eliminated committees that either haven't met in some time or have completed the work for which they were created, including the broadband committee, nuclear committee, Bertram Chain of Lakes Advisory Council, Emergency Management/Public Health Emergency Preparedness Board, Local Emergency Medical Systems Council, Public Works/Labor Management Board and Wright County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Planning Committee. In addition, the board decided to remove commissioner participation in MEADA (Mentorship Education and Drug Awareness Coalition of Wright County), Minnesota Rural Counties and the Wright County Agricultural Society (County Fair Board).

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to forward the updated list of commissioner committee and advisory board assignments to the Jan. 7, 2025 county board organizational meeting.

VII. Commissioner Expense Budgets

Kryzer explained that current commissioner expense account, which includes costs associated with attending conferences and events that conduct county business, was set at a level of \$2,400 for 2024. According to documentation from the Finance Department, as of Dec. 3, two commissioners were over the \$2,400 threshold – District 1 Commissioner Tina Diedrick (\$436.56) and District 4 Commissioner Nadine Schoen (\$474.16). Holland said she would agree to increase of the expense account to \$2,700 annually, but no more than that. Overall, as of Dec. 3, \$8,982.56 of the overall line item budget of \$12,000 for all five commissioners had been expended.

Schoen expressed frustration over the process, citing that she never had a similar situation happen in her 12 years as a city council member. She said she is very fiscally responsible and did her due diligence to stay under the budgeted amount and the only reason her expense budget went over was due to unforeseen additional costs at the Transportation Alliance Fly-In in Washington D.C. – a trip she has made before and one that helped fast track I-94 expansion between Monticello and Albertville and garnered millions in federal funding dollars coming into Wright County.

Vetsch proposed setting the 2025 commissioner expense budgets at \$2,700 as of Jan. 1, 2025, but will actualize the overages from 2024 with a negative carry-forward. Commissioners who went over their budgets in 2024 will have that amount removed from their expense allocation in 2025. Any money remaining in commissioner expense accounts at the end of December will be returned to the General Fund. Kaczmarek said most of the key conferences take place annually and the commissioners can decide among themselves well in advance which conferences should be attended and by whom, as well as making sure the conferences fall under the designation of commissioner duties. Holland asked if she could put the remaining money in her district account (\$329.81) into Schoen's account. Kryzer said that was at the discretion of Holland. She said she wanted to transfer the remaining balance into Schoen's account, reducing Schoen's 2024 overage to \$144.35.

RECOMMENDATION: The consensus of the board was to increase the Commissioner Expense Budget to \$2,700 per commissioner district in 2025 with a negative carry-forward for commissioners who exceed their expense accounts in 2024. The consensus was to approve the remaining balance in the Commissioner District 3 expense account (\$329.81) be transferred into the Commissioner District 4 account and the transfer to take place by Dec. 31, 2024.

Meeting adjourned at 11:26 a.m.

County Board Workshop minutes submitted by John Holler, communications specialist